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Letter dated 6 June 2017 from the Permanent Representative of Spain to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General

I have the honour to transmit the Chair's summary of the first meeting of the Women and Peace and Security National Focal Points Network, held in Alicante, Spain, on 26 and 27 April 2017 (see annex I), and the joint communiqué adopted on that occasion (see annex II). This initiative was launched on 23 September 2016 on the margins of the ministerial week of the General Assembly.

I should be grateful if the present letter and its annexes could be circulated as a document of the General Assembly, under agenda item 61, and of the Security Council.

(*Signed*) Román **Oyarzun**

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Annex I to the letter dated 6 June 2017 from the Permanent Representative of Spain to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General

Chair's summary of the first meeting of the Women and Peace and Security National Focal Points Network

Alicante, Spain, 26 and 27 April 2017

Introduction

The Women and Peace and Security National Focal Points Network is a cross-regional forum of representatives of Governments and regional and international organizations. The Network provides a space in which to exchange experiences and best practices on women and peace and security from the national and regional perspectives and was created as a tool to improve national and regional performance in this field.

In the joint communiqué of the founding meeting of the Network, held in New York in September 2016, members affirmed their commitment to advancing the participation of women in decision-making on peace and security, as well as in peace and security policies and programmes at the national level. They acknowledged that Member States bore the primary responsibility for integrating commitments on women and peace and security into domestic policies and normative frameworks, and reaffirmed their commitment to promoting the development and implementation of national action plans and strategies on women and peace and security. Recognizing the need to articulate the impact of national action plans more effectively, the focal points decided to continue to develop strategies for the enhanced design and implementation of high-impact national action plans.

To further fulfil this commitment, the first meeting of the Network, held in Alicante, Spain, on 26 and 27 April 2017, was focused on national action plans for women and peace and security. National action plans are a recommendation generated by Security Council resolution 1325 (2000) as one tool to systematically integrate gender into national, regional or international peace and security efforts. Countries are encouraged to develop national action plans to take the larger goals of resolution 1325 (2000) and subsequent resolutions and contextualize them in national, domestic or foreign policy objectives.

The two-day meeting brought together more than 100 national focal points, Government actors and civil society representatives from 61 countries. Following plenary sessions on the morning of the first day, participants broke into three working groups on the following topics of emerging importance for national action plans: addressing structural barriers to gender equality, civil society engagement in the design and implementation of national action plans and preventing or countering violent extremism and national action plans. The second day featured discussions with international and regional representatives, a session on high-impact national action plans and closing remarks centred on actions and next steps for the Network.

Opening plenary sessions

The opening plenary session featured welcoming remarks by the Director of Casa Mediterráneo, Miguel Oliveros, followed by opening remarks by the Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs of Spain, Ildefonso Castro. The Permanent Representative of Spain to the United Nations, Román Oyarzun Marchesi, then moderated a discussion with:

(a) The Minister of Women Affairs and Social Development of Nigeria, Aisha Jummai al-Hassan;

(b) The Undersecretary for Peacebuilding and Development and Director of the Office of the Presidential Adviser on the Peace Process of the Philippines, Diosita T. Andot;

(c) The Permanent Secretary of the Ministry of International Relations and Cooperation of Namibia, Selma Ashipala-Musvayi;

(d) The Assistant Secretary-General and Deputy Executive Director for Policy and Programme for the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN-Women), Yannick Glemarec.

The wide-ranging discussion underscored the continued importance of the women and peace and security agenda, especially given that traditional security responses are no longer sufficient to address modern threats and instabilities. Mr. Oyarzun emphasized how critical national action plans could be in implementing resolution 1325 (2000), and encouraged focal points to return to their posts and build support for the agenda, including by raising awareness thereof among ministries, such as of the interior and of defence, and the President's office, which might not be directly working on those issues. The representatives of Nigeria, the Philippines, Namibia and UN-Women then shared their national or organizational experiences with national action plans or national gender, peace or security policies. Ms. Jummai al-Hassan spoke about the Nigerian national action plan, and noted that the concept of security had been expanded in the second revision of the plan to include issues of violent extremism, trauma healing and disarmament and demobilization, in addition to the inclusion of local or zonal action plans to further localize those issues. Ms. Andot reflected on the experience of the Philippines and the launch of its third national action plan, in 2017. That iteration incorporated emerging domestic concerns, such as ethnic and intercommunal violence, terrorism and organized crime, and made special efforts to support women's organizations and economic empowerment programmes. Ms. Ashipala-Musvayi said that the forthcoming national action plan of Namibia had been created through intragovernmental brainstorming sessions. She noted that the comprehensive gender policies of Namibia had helped to address structural barriers to the participation of women in the security sector. She said that Namibia offered to host the Network meeting in 2019. Lastly, Mr. Glemarec touched on the need for national action plans to be flexible in order to be able to more readily address emerging peace and security concerns.

Following the opening plenary session, a grounding session was held on emerging trends and national action plans. The Director of the Human Rights Office of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Cooperation of Spain, Adela Díaz Bernárdez, opened the session by providing the context in which the topics had been selected and outlining the goals for the day's working group sessions. The Vice-Chair of Inclusive Security, Mirsad Jacevic, provided a bigger picture of the status of national action plans on women and peace and security around the world, noting that, to date, more than 65 national action plans had been created or were in process, with more than 20 countries on their second or third plan. Three speakers then introduced the following focus topics of the working groups and provided greater context to these issues in their own experiences:

(a) Structural barriers to gender equality: Policy Adviser and Military Liaison Officer of the Peace and Security Section of UN-Women, Jennifer Wittwer;

(b) Civil society engagement in the design and implementation of national action plans: European External Action Service Principal Adviser on Gender and on

the Implementation of Security Council Resolution 1325 (2000) on Women and Peace and Security, Mara Marinaki;

(c) Preventing or countering violent extremism and national action plans: Director of the Africa and Asia Division of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Senegal, Mariame Sy.

While not exhaustive, the following is a summary of the key points and recommendations from the remarks and working group sessions. Several trends and recommendations emerged across the working groups. In the plenary report, all rapporteurs noted a need for better collaboration across international and regional bodies, national and local governments and civil society organizations. Representatives also stressed the importance of cultivating political will and champions for the Security Council resolution 1325 (2000) agenda, in particular in security sector institutions, and noted that gender equality and a gender perspective should be seen as a holistic framework across various dimensions, including human resources management, operational planning and conduct, special measures to reduce exclusions to the participation of women and strategic direction in peace and security agencies. One intervention that might persuade these actors was the generation of a larger body of rigorous empirical research, a point championed by focal points and representatives. Such research and all national action plans should directly consider the diversity of the experiences of women and girls in conflict, both in terms of intersectionalities and underrepresented populations, as well as the very different roles played by women during conflict. Lastly, each working group stressed how critical it was to have civil society engagement throughout the creation, implementation and evaluation of national action plans.

Addressing structural barriers to gender equality

The working group on addressing structural barriers to gender equality was facilitated by Ms. Wittwer, with statements by the Algerian Senator and Adviser on Mediation of the Toledo International Centre for Peace, Hafida Benchehida, the Director General for Human Rights and Women's International Affairs of Afghanistan, Abeda Osman, and the Director of the Women's Directorate at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Worship of Argentina, María Luisa Martino.

Representatives recognized that national action plans on women and peace and security had the potential to address structural barriers preventing the participation of women in the domain of peace and security. The working group discussed challenges and strategies relating to structural barriers to gender equality, with a particular emphasis on barriers within the security sector, although some also referred to mediation and diplomacy. The group agreed that key challenges included communication around the women and peace and security agenda, both in terms of the lack of knowledge of Security Council resolution 1325 (2000) and the lack of effective exchange between diplomats, agencies and civil society. Another challenge was the difficulty of integrating a gender perspective into peace and security efforts and its effect on operational outcomes and leadership.

Representatives shared strategies and examples of how nations and organizations had been able to address structural barriers. Strategies included the provision of broader and more strategic training within peace and security agencies to help to close the communication and political gaps at all levels. Second, the working group said that women and peace and security measures should be institutionalized within legislation, doctrine and planning and business processes, and, as necessary, include targets, quotas or special measures to achieve specific goals and eliminate discriminatory practices. Another important aspect of institutionalization was the need to embed the women and peace and security

principles into each Government's approach to the human resources management of personnel in peace and security agencies, by ensuring equal access to all opportunities regardless of gender.

Representatives stressed that it was critical that, in addition to mainstreaming within institutional policies, senior leaders promote and thoroughly implement women and peace and security principles in their work, demonstrating their commitment through leadership. They should also promote and implement gender integration and diversity as a way to improve comprehensive approaches and operational effectiveness.

Civil society engagement in the design and implementation of national action plans

The working group on civil society engagement in the design and implementation of national action plans was facilitated by a Researcher at the Autonomous University of Barcelona, María Villellas, with interventions from the Director General for International Order, the United Nations and Arms Control at the Federal Foreign Office of Germany, Patricia Flor, a Senior Legal Officer from Sierra Leone, Ashmia Sesay, and the International Coordinator of the Global Network of Women Peacebuilders, Mavic Cabrera-Balleza.

Participants reaffirmed the importance of identifying and promoting partnerships with civil society and local organizations working on women and peace and security issues. They welcomed the critical contributions made by civil society to the development and implementation of high-impact national action plans. The working group acknowledged the benefits that an inclusive approach to the design, implementation and monitoring and evaluation processes of national action plans brought to often limited time and resources. Participants also referred to the importance of the involvement of civil society representatives from the beginning of a national action plan, not simply including them in a one-off consultation after drafting. This sustained participation also helped to create a sense of ownership among civil society representatives, who were often the primary implementers of national action plan activities. Inclusive and collaborative approaches to the implementation of women and peace and security also required a stronger connection between the agenda and a variety of existing monitoring and reporting systems, including the universal periodic review and the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women, using its general recommendation No. 30 (2013) on women in conflict prevention, conflict and post-conflict situations.

The working group noted significant challenges to sustained civil society engagement and support, such as a lack of dedicated funding for participation and difficulty institutionalizing their contributions throughout a national action plan process. They discussed interventions to address those challenges, including measures to formalize civil society representation in national action plan committees or working groups, and the importance of the self-selection of civil society representatives. One participant suggested that that could help to address the perception of "civil society on demand", whereby whoever could attend a national action plan meeting was invited at the last moment. Institutionalizing participation also reduced the reliance on the presence or advocacy of good actors within Government to extend an invitation and instead made participation part of standard practice. Lastly, another challenge highlighted was that most civil society engagement happened at the national level, but implementation was more likely to occur outside the capital. One potential solution was the creation of national action plan steering committees at both the national and local levels that could provide both input and feedback on national action plan activities.

Preventing or countering violent extremism and national action plans

The working group on preventing or countering violent extremism and national action plans was facilitated by the Ambassador for Women and Peace and Security of Finland, Ann-Sofie Stude, with statements from the Office Director at the Institute for Security Studies in Dakar, Lori-Anne Théroux-Bénoni, the Deputy Director for Human Rights and Democracy at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Belgium, Véronique Joosten, and the Principal Gender Officer at the Ministry of Public Service, Youth and Gender Affairs of Kenya, Mary Kaburu.

Participants emphasized the importance of aligning national women and peace and security strategies with any related plans and policies aimed at preventing and countering violent extremism. There was a significant discussion on the terminology around violent extremism, as focal points noted that their countries referred to those strategies or activities using a wide variety of terms, including preventing and countering violent extremism, insurgency, counter-terrorism, counter-insurgency and stabilization. Although there was no determinative recommendation on whether and how gender should be integrated into a nation's policy on preventing and countering violent extremism or, conversely, how those topics should be included within a national action plan on women and peace and security, focal points emphasized the importance of coherence and harmonization between such policies. An important distinction, noted by one participant, was that a plan for preventing and countering violent extremism might consider drivers of violent extremism for both men and women and interventions that addressed the entire community, whereas the national action plan on women and peace and security looked more conscientiously at women, girls and gendered approaches. Representatives noted that, when plans and strategies did not include a gender perspective, there was a risk of gaps in their design and implementation and the ineffective use of limited resources. The working group also discussed the need to cultivate champions within security sector institutions to ensure that all the right actors were at the table during the formulation of such plans. They suggested providing persuasive operational-effectiveness arguments and capacity-building for security actors tasked with drafting policies or making them operational. Multiple participants noted that the process of creating a national action plan could become a productive opportunity to educate and persuade security actors of the importance of including a gender perspective and to provide practical guidance for what that meant in the context of policies, plans and strategies.

The working group recommended conducting or collecting research at the national and subnational levels in order to better understand the specific roles of women in the prevention of and participation in violent extremism and to ensure that responses were localized and context-specific. While religion was discussed as an important consideration in understanding how to prevent or counter violent extremism, participants also noted important drivers, such as limited economic opportunity, insufficient educational systems, political instability and youth bulges, all of which needed to be better understood from a gender perspective. Lastly, participants echoed the importance of civil society participation, noting that civil society engagement in the design and implementation of programming for preventing and countering violent extremism was critical to providing timely, ground-tested and community-sensitive responses to violent extremism.

National action plans from the regional and international perspectives

Focal points can champion the women and peace and security agenda at the regional and international levels. The second day began with a panel featuring international and regional organizations reflecting upon regional action plans and

their internal policies and programmes in place to address peace and security. The Deputy Permanent Representative of New Zealand to the United Nations, Carolyn Schwalger, moderated a discussion with representatives of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), UN-Women and the Union for the Mediterranean, who shared specific examples of their initiatives and some challenges in fully implementing Security Council resolution 1325 (2000). All speakers reiterated the need for coherence and coordination among international, regional and national policies on women and peace and security. The representative of ECOWAS, Onyinye Onwuka, and the representative of NATO, Hildur Sigurdardottir, provided details of their regional and organizational plans on women and peace and security, highlighting how those strategies had helped to institutionalize a gender perspective in their work. The representative of UN-Women in Asia and the Pacific, Hanny Cueva-Beteta, presented findings from a recent symposium and a report reviewing the region's nine national action plans for common themes and emerging topics, such as violent extremism, climate change and humanitarian crises. Lastly, the representative of the Union for the Mediterranean, Fatiha Hassouni, spoke about the organization's forthcoming ministerial meeting and dialogue, which would bring together stakeholders from across the region to discuss issues such as coordination on national strategies, research on violent extremism and policy responses to migration and the refugee crisis.

Importance of high-impact national action plans

Throughout the discussions, participants emphasized that national strategies must have a direct impact on the lives of men and women around the world. Mr. Jacevic highlighted several key elements as features of high-impact national action plans, including:

(a) Cultivating political will within all implementing bodies and at all levels;

(b) Ensuring coordination across responsible government agencies and implementing partners;

(c) Engaging civil society throughout the design, implementation and evaluation stages;

(d) Dedicating funding to the implementation of national action plans, including costing measures;

(e) Building technical skills and devoting resources to monitoring and evaluation.

The Deputy Director of the United Nations Coordination and Conflict Resolution Unit at the Department of Foreign Affairs of Ireland, Paula Molloy, and a Senior Adviser at the Agency for Gender Equality of Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kika Babic-Svetlin, provided examples of how, after assessing their previous national action plans, they had identified improvements for the next iteration of the plan. Advances included using a theory of change to identify the overall objectives and desired effects, streamlining and reducing indicators to focus on real impact and making the national action plan design process more inclusive by expanding the actors involved in its design beyond traditional peace and security agencies. The Head of the United Nations Department at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Morocco, Redouane Houssaini, noted that, although Morocco did not have a national action plan on women and peace and security, the Government was conducting women and peace and security programmes, such as those in the framework of the Mediation in the Mediterranean initiative in partnership with Spain and other members of the initiative. He agreed that a national action plan

would be a helpful tool to coordinate activities across the Government. Throughout the discussion, participants noted that it was critical for work under national action plans to be reported publicly and regularly through mechanisms such as parliamentary hearings, shadow reports or international forums.

Specific action and closing

Participants were asked to consider potential commitments and suggestions that they would like to recommend to their Governments with regard to national action plans and policies on women and peace and security. Commitments included:

(a) Continue to speak with security colleagues and seek coherence on policies on preventing and countering violent extremism (Finland);

(b) Continue to work on localization and encouraging donor country partners to look at ways to develop local ownership (Global Network of Women Peacebuilders);

(c) Review the monitoring and evaluation framework to incorporate some of the insights from the meetings, such as fewer but more specific indicators (Kenya);

(d) Incorporate elements of diversities and differences (Thailand);

(e) Consider how best to provide long-term commitment and support to civil society (Norway);

(f) Institutionalize civil society engagement and relationships throughout the national action plan (Canada);

(g) Incorporate new and emerging themes in the next national action plan (Norway).

A request was made for the next Network meeting to include a session on establishing or re-establishing national action plans for those countries that did not have an active plan.

At the close of the event, the representative of UN-Women said that the entity would host the secretariat for the Network in New York and mentioned that the recruitment of a staff member to support the Network was under way. Among other tasks, the Network coordinator would:

(a) Establish and maintain a database of focal points;

(b) Produce regular newsletters to promote new research, best practices and funding and capacity-building opportunities and map national and regional women and peace and security actions and initiatives;

(c) Provide technical and logistical support for the biannual and expert meetings.

The representative also noted that the secretariat would need sustained engagement and funding from Member States moving forward to support those activities. Spain, which would organize a follow-up Network meeting in New York in the third quarter of 2017, emphasized the importance of building a real network through which focal points would be able to share information and exchange best practices. The representative of Germany confirmed the country's commitment to serving as host for the next meeting of the Network, likely to be held in April or May 2018 in Berlin. The meeting would aim to build upon the strong progress made in Alicante towards exchanging best practices, common challenges and possible solutions, and again include a broad set of actors, including civil society organizations.

Annex II to the letter dated 6 June 2017 from the Permanent Representative of Spain to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General

Joint communiqué of the first meeting of the Women and Peace and Security National Focal Points Network

We, the representatives of Afghanistan, Argentina, Australia, Belgium, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Burkina Faso, Canada, Chile, Colombia, Croatia, Cyprus, Czechia, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Guatemala, Hungary, Indonesia, Ireland, Italy, Japan, Jordan, Kazakhstan, Kenya, Latvia, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Malaysia, Mali, Malta, Montenegro, Morocco, Namibia, the Netherlands, New Zealand, Nigeria, Norway, the Philippines, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Senegal, Serbia, Sierra Leone, Slovakia, Slovenia, South Africa, Spain, Sri Lanka, Sweden, Switzerland, Thailand, Tunisia, Ukraine, the United Arab Emirates, the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, the United States of America and Uruguay, as well as of the Economic Community of West African States, the European Union, the North Atlantic Treaty Organization, the Union for the Mediterranean and the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN-Women), have come together in Alicante, Spain, on 26 and 27 April 2017, for the first meeting of the Women and Peace and Security National Focal Points Network.

The Network was launched in New York on 23 September 2016, as a cross-regional forum of States with diverse backgrounds and of international and regional organizations, with the aim of providing a space in which to share and exchange lessons learned and best practices in order to advance the implementation of all Security Council resolutions on women and peace and security, including on how to: develop and review high-impact national strategies; integrate gender analysis into all security assessments and prevention approaches; strengthen the participation of women in the security sector, peace processes and mediation efforts; and address conflict-related sexual and gender-based violence.

On that occasion, the founding members of the Network affirmed, as highlighted at the high-level review of the implementation of Security Council resolution 1325 (2000) conducted in October 2015, that Member States and regional organizations remained the most influential actors in the implementation of the women and peace and security agenda and, as such, bore the primary responsibility for integrating commitments on women and peace and security into domestic policies and normative frameworks.

At the first meeting, the members of the Network reaffirmed their commitment to promoting the development and implementation of national action plans and strategies on women and peace and security as a tool to systematically integrate gender into peace and security efforts. Recognizing the need to articulate the impact of national action plans more effectively, the focal points decided to continue to develop strategies for the enhanced design and implementation of high-impact national action plans and to close the existing gap between research and practice. The meeting was structured with three working groups on addressing structural barriers to gender equality, preventing and countering violent extremism and national action plans and civil society engagement in the design and implementation of national action plans.

The focal points recognized that national action plans on women and peace and security had the potential to address structural barriers preventing the participation of women in the domain of peace and security. The working group on

addressing structural barriers to gender equality discussed a range of challenges and strategies in that area. The group agreed that the key challenges were the communication of the women and peace and security agenda and the difficulty of integrating a gender perspective into peace and security efforts and its effect on operational outcomes and leadership. Strategies to combat those barriers included broader and more strategic training within peace and security agencies, mainstreaming women and peace and security across legislation, doctrine and planning and business processes and ensuring that senior leaders promoted, implemented and mainstreamed women and peace and security principles.

Considering the growing challenge of radicalization and the rise of violent extremism for the effective implementation of the women and peace and security agenda, the focal points further emphasized the importance of aligning national women and peace and security strategies with any related strategies and policies aimed at preventing and countering violent extremism. Building upon Security Council resolution 2242 (2015) and the Secretary-General's Plan of Action to Prevent Violent Extremism, launched in December 2015, the focal points underlined the importance of advancing the meaningful inclusion and leadership of women in the development and the implementation of strategies and programmes aimed at preventing and countering violent extremism. In particular, the working group on preventing and countering violent extremism recommended conducting or collecting research, including at the national and subnational levels, to better understand the specific roles of women in the prevention of and participation in violent extremism. Participants emphasized capacity-building as one entry point for introducing the women and peace and security agenda into strategies and programmes aimed at preventing and countering violent extremism and counter-terrorism, ensuring that responses were localized and context-specific.

The focal points reaffirmed the importance of promoting partnerships with civil society and local organizations working on women and peace and security issues. They welcomed the critical contributions made by civil society to the development and implementation of high-impact national action plans. They acknowledged the benefits that an inclusive approach to the design, implementation and monitoring and evaluation processes of national action plans brought to often limited time and resources. The working group on civil society engagement noted significant challenges to sustained civil society engagement and support, such as dedicated funding and institutionalizing the contributions of civil society throughout a national action plan process. They discussed models to address those challenges, including the creation of steering committees at both the national and local levels.

Throughout the discussions, participants emphasized how important it was for national strategies to have a direct impact on the lives of men and women around the world. Several key elements were identified as important to ensure that a national action plan had a high impact:

(a) Cultivating political will at all levels;

(b) Ensuring coordination across government agencies;

(c) Engaging civil society;

(d) Funding national action plan implementation (whether dedicated or in agency baselines). Participants noted that in some cases national action plans had not been implemented, in particular by developing countries, owing to a lack of funding;

(e) Building technical skills and devoting resources to monitoring and evaluation. Regular reporting mechanisms are critical for assessing the progress made on the implementation of national action plans. Participants shared examples

of reporting through mechanisms such as parliamentary hearings, shadow reports or reports presented to international forums.

The importance of coherence and coordination among international, regional and national efforts on women and peace and security was also recognized. Representatives of international and regional organizations shared concrete examples of their initiatives and some challenges to fully implementing the agenda of Security Council resolution 1325 (2000).

It was decided at the founding meeting that the focal points would meet twice a year to ensure the Network's momentum and sustainability, once in a capital and once on the sidelines of the annual open debate of the Security Council on women and peace and security. Following the first meeting, convened in Spain on 26 and 27 April 2017, Spain will organize the next meeting on the margins of the open debate of the Security Council on women and peace and security, in New York in 2017. Germany offered to host the next meeting in the capital, to be held in April or May 2018, and Namibia offered to host the following meeting, to be held in 2019.